



The Ames Intelligencer

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Menu Recalls Glory Days When Sheldon-Munn Was New

by Farwell T. Brown

1915 had been a big year in the annals of Ames history — ground had been broken for four major buildings in the “down town” Ames area — the new City Hall, Mary Greeley Hospital, the Masonic Building and the Sheldon-Munn Hotel. Also, that same year a major expansion of the city light plant was under construction.

It is the Sheldon-Munn Hotel that comes to mind particularly at this moment because it was there that the Brown family gathered for their Christmas day dinner in 1919. It was but a few days after my ninth birthday and the Sheldon-Munn was in all its glory in those days. It is something of a pleasant memory trip to go back those sixty-six years to relive that day's experience. In a recent interview with Mrs. Margaret Rogers, a long time resident of Ames, she has provided interesting detail relating to the history of the Sheldon-Munn. She was the young daughter of Fred and Louella Merrill when they became the hotel's first managers in 1916.

Ames' early hotels had begun to outlive their usefulness in a growing college community as early as 1902. The Ames Commercial Club, on February 27 in that year, had held a smoker down at the old Davis House — the red brick hotel that stood on the corner of Main and Duff. That Ames needed a new and modern hotel was the consensus of that meeting. A committee consisting of



A team and buggy and a Model T Ford constituted traffic near the Sheldon-Munn Hotel in this 1919 photograph.

Capt. Greeley, Parley Sheldon, F. N. Fowler, J. F. Cavell and Galen Tilden was appointed that night to launch a fund raising effort to build such a hotel.

After twelve years of considering proposals for a new hotel, or the extensive remodeling of one of the old existing hotels, a group of Ames business men organized the “Ames Improvement Company” to carry out the community's desire to have a hotel “that would meet not only immediate needs, but meet the future needs of a growing city.” A successful venture was finally assured. Parley Sheldon, banker and perennial mayor of Ames, H. L. and A. H. Munn, lumber yard owners, contracted for the hotel's construction in June of 1915. Sheldon and the

Munns remained the owners until a major interest was sold to Tagney-McGinn Hotels in 1926. The Ames Improvement Association was involved in arranging for leasing and management.

Ground was broken in late 1915 and the Sheldon-Munn Hotel was formally opened on May 31, 1916. Dean C. F. Curtiss was toastmaster on the occasion of a formal dinner that evening. Dean E. W. Stanton spoke on “The Town and the College” and Harvey Ingham of the *Des Moines Register* spoke on “Greater Iowa.” There were other dignitaries on the agenda that evening, too, and the new modern social and service center of Ames was very properly launched.

With its four floors of 72 fine

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Leland Himan, president
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guest rooms, the hotel provided a large ballroom on the fourth floor, a private dining room on third, various meeting rooms, sales display rooms, a four chair barber shop in the east basement, a large main dining room on first and a separate grill or coffee shop on the main street side. All dining facilities were served by the large kitchen under the direction of six full-time chefs!

The new hotel was to be the meeting place — the show place really — for town and college — for there was no Memorial Union then. The hotel was booked months ahead for social events, fraternity and sorority dances. Professional meetings of many kinds met there. According to Mrs. Rogers it was not uncommon for the Sheldon-Munn to be the site of a ballroom dance, a private dinner party on third, a smoker in the basement, a convention group somewhere, and a main dining room full of "off the road or street" guests, all at the same time in those days.

It was to this place that the Brown family came for their Christmas dinner on December 25, 1919. Tradition brought our particular family together at Christmas and at Thanksgiving, trading off between the two grandparent families, both residing in Ames.

Grandfather and Grandmother Brown had attained the age and family numbers had grown to the point where the Hotel provided the ideal place for that important family event that year.

A long table had been reserved for us in the main dining room. As we arrived — there were four families of us then in Ames — we were directed by way of the elevator to the second floor ladies parlor to await the arrival of the rest of the uncles and aunts,

cousins and, of course, the grandparents.

But I will never forget the hotel lobby that day. It was terribly cold outdoors and as we entered at the main doorway on the south side of the building the burning log fire in the fireplace that was on the east wall of the lobby greeted us. The lobby then was much larger than today, as it included all of the area today partitioned off for the present Senior Citizen's Center and also the area occupied now by a barbershop. Original ceilings were high with "square" pillars that can still be seen although the very magnificent marble looking surface has long since been removed or covered over.

Beautifully tailored drapes were a dark blue. All of the Hotel drapes in the lobby and in the dining and ballrooms were monogrammed with the letters "S.M."

In this setting a string ensemble was playing to one side of the huge fireplace. They had several regular musicians who played every evening in the hotel. One was Fred Snyder who was an engineer with the Highway Commission at the time. Both he and his wife were accomplished violinists in Ames. Another was Harold Kramer, a pianist, who played in the Sheldon-Munn dining room for several years then went East where he made a name for himself as an entertainer.

After the family had gathered, we were called to the dining room on the first floor — entering through the lobby. The present entrance into today's restaurant is the same as in 1919. But the dining room then extended to the Kellogg side and all along the alley side on the North — much larger than is apparent today.

The dining room ceiling, like the lobby area, was high with moulded plaster scroll work along the ceiling corners. By the time the main dining room was open, on holidays and on Sunday noons all through the year, the string trio or quartet had moved out of the lobby into the elevated alcove that was built into the south wall of the room. It was reached by way of a curved staircase. There was

Sheldon-Munn

Christmas Menu

\$1.50

Blue Points

Celery Olives
Essence of Fowl, Venetian
Dorade of Salmon Fleurette
Club House Chips

Young Capon, Braised a la Cumberland
Iowa Special Fattened Goose, Spiced Apple
Chestnut Dressing
Roast Turkey, Cranberry Sauce

Mashed or Steamed Potatoes
Garden Peas

Pineapple Sherbet (Our Make)
French Fritters

Head Lettuce, Thousand Island Dressing
Cheese Wafers

Apple Pie Mince Pie
English Plum Pudding

Sliced Oranges Chandelily

Neopolitan Ice Cream Cake
Coffee

Thursday,
Dec. 25, 1919

a piano permanently installed in this "elevated orchestra pit," and dinner music was a regular feature of both weekday and Sunday dinner hours — and on holidays, of course.

Christmas dinner at Grandmother's was always complete, two kinds of pie could be assumed. The Sheldon-Munn proved to be no exception!

Before we ate, as I expected, Grandfather gave the blessing — but at the hotel it was something special. With the main dining room full of dining couples or groups all smaller than ours, and all around us, how would he handle it?

Very simple, he just held up his hand. He was, as I recall, a rather large man, by nature the "take charge" kind. He glanced around the room as the musicians completed a

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This walnut log cabin stood just off the turn in Old Stage Coach Road north of Ames. It was dismantled and then rebuilt northwest of Missouri Valley where it still stands.

Hotel — from page 2

selection, and merely asked that "all be quiet for a moment." He then proceeded in his natural clearly spoken manner and gave the same kind of blessing that he was accustomed to give.

And the room was hushed for the few moments — and then we were served.

Sheldon-Munn waiters were quite formal in those days. Precise in manner, they omitted no expected move in their service. One was Henry Gater whom I remember because he must have come to Ames at about the time the Sheldon-Munn was first opened. His family was one of the first black families to reside in Ames. They lived just a block north of us on Kellogg.

The tableware at the Hotel was a "lovely silver," Mrs. Rogers recalls. The tablecloths were a white damask — with all linen napkins. Fluted goblets were used at all special occasions. Like in the lobby, draperies were a rich blue with gold braid borders or ties with the S.M. monogram. The chairs were sturdy, I think painted gold.

The multi-course dinner — I could not today, sixty-six years later, have detailed the content had not Mrs.

Rogers shown me the 1919 printed menu for that day that is still in her possession. It is today a collector's item. What a Christmas dinner — and for a dollar and a half!

AHA Treasury Balance \$1,790

The Ames Heritage Association treasury showed a balance of \$1,790.98 on Dec. 10, 1985, according to Marvin Miller, treasurer.

Income for the year to that date totaled \$1976.53 and consisted of gifts and donation, \$65.39; interest income, \$127.14; membership dues, \$1,624; Allan Leffler memorial, \$75 and sale of souvenirs, \$85.

Disbursements for the same period totaled \$1,847.13 and consisted of advertising and promotion, \$27.24; dues and subscriptions, \$25; donations and contributions, \$50; insurance, \$687; photo and video, \$480; postage \$50.66; printing and stationery, \$392.69; Hoggatt School maintenance and repair, \$102.47; and miscellaneous, \$32.07.

Renewals Due in January

Ames Heritage Association memberships are due for renewal in January for the 1986 year. New memberships will be warmly welcomed.

Funds are needed not only to maintain and operate historic Hoggatt School, but also to help develop and strengthen the Association as a vital and effective force for discovering and preserving Ames history.

Some of the uses for which 1986 funds are sought include:

- Expansion of *The Ames Intelligencer* to become a regularly published journal of Ames history;
- Further development of the project to record significant Ames history as recalled by selected senior citizens;
- Purchase of a more appropriate stove for Hoggatt school;
- Discovery of storage space for artifacts and materials involved in Ames history until they can be permanently housed in a museum.

To help keep the Ames Heritage Association strong and progressive, please renew your membership and, if possible, bring new members into the organization.

Annual membership dues are: Regular, \$5; Business and Organization, \$25 or more; Sustaining, \$100. Life membership is \$1,000.

Make checks payable to Ames Heritage Association and send them to:

Jan Halverson
P.O. Box 821
Ames, IA 50010

Please enroll me as a 1986 member of Ames Heritage Association. I enclose \$ _____.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Central Students Help School Move

The emotional impact of moving from an aged and tradition-laden schoolhouse to a more modern building is contained in this story from the Jan. 19, 1938 Ames Tribune-Times. The Central school mentioned stood on the site of the present Central Junior High School. The Senior High School, recently demolished, stood across Clark Avenue to the east.

— Editor

A mixed feeling of sadness and gladness prevailed among the teaching staff of Central Junior High School Wednesday as final plans were arranged to move pupils and books over to the Senior High School, Thursday, thereby ending the 57 years of existence of Central.

On the whole, the joy of getting out of the worn out building, the original part of which was built in 1881, exceed the sentimental attachment which has grown during the years of association with the old school.

Thursday morning junior high school pupils will assemble in the morning for the last class period. Miss Verna Schmidt, who has been principal since the junior high was started in 1924, will give instructions regarding the new arrangement of classes in the half day schedule on which both junior and senior highs will use the present senior building.

Then the junior high pupils will move their books and other equipment over to the senior high building. Junior high school will be dismissed Thursday noon for those who have completed the first semester's work.

Anna M. Van Duzer, at 102 certainly the oldest member of the Ames Heritage Association, died July 17 in Carlsbad, Calif. Burial was in the Ames Municipal Cemetery with the Rev. William Ostroot, Ascension



Jack Shelley will speak at the annual Ames Heritage Association meeting on Tuesday, Jan. 14 in the Ames Public Library.

Lutheran Church, officiating.

Anna Roland was born May 1, 1883, in Ames to John and Julia Roland. She was educated in the Ames schools and worked in Ames. In 1910 she and Fred R. Van Duzer were married in Ames.

Survivors include a son, Kenneth R., of Oceanside, Calif; three grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. Her husband died in 1967.

More Subjects Sought

Names of persons suitable for inclusion in the oral history of Ames series are sought.

Ames Heritage Association
P.O. Box 821
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Shelley Speaker at AHA Meeting

Jack Shelley, widely known radio and television broadcaster and president of the Boone County Historical Society, will speak at the annual meeting of the Ames Heritage Association on Tuesday, Jan. 14, at 7:30 p.m. in the Ames Public Library.

Shelley, now a professor emeritus of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at Iowa State University, will discuss major factors contributing to the success of three Boone county historical projects, the Mamie Eisenhower birthplace, the Boone and Scenic Valley railroad, and the Kate Shelley memorial. The speaker is a nephew of Kate Shelley of legendary fame in whose honor the great railroad bridge west of Boone is named.

Officers and five members of the Board of Directors will be elected at the meeting.

The public is invited.

Interview subjects should have a long-time knowledge of some phase of Ames history.

Anyone with a suggestion may contact Farwell T. Brown, 1801 Twentieth Street, 232-9444.

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